

**State of New Mexico**



Office of Attorney General  
**PATRICIA A. MADRID**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Sam Thompson  
(505) 222-9174

**PRESS RELEASE**

**AG Announces Online Service to Help Consumers Avoid  
Hurricane-Damaged Used Cars**

**(Albuquerque, NM)**—Attorney General Patricia Madrid today announced that an online service is available to help consumers avoid purchasing used cars that were damaged in recent hurricanes.

“In the aftermath of recent hurricanes in the Gulf, many cars were heavily damaged. Past experience tells us that unscrupulous individuals will clean up many damaged vehicles and attempt to sell them in other states without disclosing the water damage. Consumers have a new tool to help them discover whether a used vehicle they are considering purchasing is one of those damaged by Katrina and Rita. This information is online at my website, right at consumers’ fingertips. This service is offered by the non-profit National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), which fights insurance fraud and vehicle theft by working with insurance companies, law enforcement and the public.”

After receiving reports and insurance claims on more than 165,000 vehicles, the NICB has compiled a list of Vehicle Identification Numbers (VIN) that are known to have been damaged in the hurricanes. Because of recent reports of storm-damaged cars being sold around the country, Attorney General Madrid urges New Mexicans to consult the NICB list before purchasing any used vehicle they may be considering.

“Insurance companies, state and local governments and salvage yards have contributed information to the NICB to help them generate this database. Once the insurance claims have been processed on many of these storm-damaged cars, the titles should indicate that they are ‘totaled’ or ‘flooded.’ But in an effort to ‘clean’ the titles, some individuals have reportedly made minor repairs to the damaged cars, made cosmetic improvements and sent them to other states where they are sold to used car dealers,” said Madrid.

“As many as 500,000 automobiles may have been severely damaged during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Without any notification that they are buying a storm-damaged vehicle, consumers could, at best, have to pay for future costly repairs and, at worst, put their own safety at risk. I urge consumers to be cautious, to research any used vehicle they are considering on the NICB website and to take their time before finalizing the purchase of a used vehicle in the upcoming months,” said Madrid.

Frank Scafidi, Public Affairs Director for NICB, said, “By making this vehicle search feature available to the public, NICB provides a service intended to prevent innocent consumers from buying a defective vehicle.”

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By following these tips, Madrid said consumers can help protect themselves from buying a storm-damaged vehicle:

- Check inside the trunk for signs of moisture, silt or corrosion. Make sure to check around the spare tire.
- Check the engine for signs of moisture damage, such as rust or silt or grass.
- Give the vehicle a smell test, inside and out. If it smells musty, it might have been flood-damaged.
- Examine the underside of the vehicle for signs of excess moisture.
- Check inside dome lights, glove boxes and other places where water might have been trapped for signs of moisture, mold, rust or silt.
- Check the interior for signs of mismatched items such as carpeting or seat covers.
- Test all electrical components, including lights, signals, switches and audio system.
- Before finalizing the purchase, have an independent certified mechanic inspect the vehicle for indications of flood damage, major repairs and safety flaws.

Consumers who feel they have unwillingly been sold a storm-damaged used vehicle should contact the New Mexico Attorney General's Office by calling toll-free 1-800-678-1508. Consumer complaint forms may also be downloaded from the Attorney General's website at [www.ago.state.nm.us](http://www.ago.state.nm.us). Consumers can also link to the NICB registry from Attorney General Madrid's website. Click on the "Consumer Protection" button and select the link to the National Insurance Crime Bureau's website.

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